

**TOWN OF NORTHFIELD, VERMONT**  
**SELECT BOARD SPECIAL MEETING**  
**Minutes of January 13, 2022**

- I. ROLL CALL.** Select Board Chair K. David Maxwell, Board members Julie H. Goodrich, Nathaniel Miller, Charles Morse, and John Stevens. Also present were Town Manager Jeff Schulz, Laurie Baroffio (Finance Director), Carolyn Stevens, and Elroy Hill.

Chair Maxwell called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. Participants had the option of attending the meeting either in person or remotely through Go-to-Meeting.

- II. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIENCE.** Those persons present were asked to rise and recite the Pledge of Allegiance. The remote contingent also participated as much as possible.

- III. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (SCHEDULED):** None.

**IV. DISCUSSION**

- a. FY 2022/2023 Town Budget Recap & Review.** Manager Schulz said since the last budget meeting (12/16/21), he and Finance Director Laurie Baroffio have gone through the initial draft of the proposed budget to make any revisions Select Board members requested during that and previous meetings. Revised budget pages have been distributed to Select Board members. Even with the changes that total an additional \$37,650 in expenses, the proposed budget (if approved by Northfield voters) would not result in an increase in the municipal tax rate due to the use of prior year surplus funds as well as pandemic recovery funds. Manager Schulz then went through the budget revisions.

The Capital Equipment Plan (CEP) for the Northfield Ambulance Service (NAS) will be increased by about \$18,000 due to the purchase of a second PowerLoad system. The original plan had been to purchase one PowerLoad system in the next fiscal year to be installed on the 2014 ambulance unit when it was "remounted" with a new cab and chassis this summer. The new plan is to purchase as well a PowerLoad system for the 2017 ambulance unit that is not rescheduled for a remount until FY 2026/2027. Prior year surplus funds will make up the gap between the funds already set aside for this purchase (\$11,500) and the estimated purchase price (\$31,800). Manager Schulz noted the Vermont League of Cities & Town (VLCT) has grant funds available for municipalities planning to purchase equipment that would lower the risk of employee injury, etc. He intends to apply for \$10,000 of these funds to add to the amount being budgeted for purchase of the PowerLoad systems.

Manager Schulz said \$3,000 has been added to the Grounds/Parks/Facilities Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) budget for the installation of new water and sewer lines to the Memorial Park bathrooms. Manager Schulz said there had been some discussion of increasing the proposed salary for the new full-time Economic Development Director (EDD) in order to recruit qualified candidates. He researched how much EDDs (or similar positions) in this region were being paid and found that the average salary was about \$30 per hour. He believes this matches the salary proposed in the first budget draft.

Manager Schulz said there had been some discussion of installing temporary speed bumps on Central Street prior to its repaving. He found some sturdy ones with a catalog price of about \$215 per set. It would cost about \$650 to purchase three (3) sets. This amount has not been added to the Highway Department budget but would be absorbed into already budgeted highway maintenance line items.

The wages for union employees (non-police) now will increase by seven percent (7%) based on the current union contract step increases and higher than expected COLA (cost-of-living adjustment) rates. Northfield Police Department (NPD) union personnel expenses will include the \$5.40 mid-year hourly wage increase and an additional three percent (3%) increase in FY 2022/2023. The cost of police dispatching will increase significantly in coming years as local police departments will be refusing to provide this service for much longer. \$10,000 has been added to this line item in anticipation of higher expenses in the next fiscal year.

In the Listers CIP budget, the \$1,000 originally budgeted in FY 2022/2023 for tax maps has been removed. Listers Chair Thomas Alsheimer had recommended this as the current balance in this account is more than sufficient for any expenditures in the coming fiscal year. The Pool CIP budget for skimmers has been reduced from \$5,000 to \$2,000 due to the healthy current balance in this account. In the Highway CIP budget, \$180,000 in prior year surplus funds will be added to the Main Street Bridge Replacement Project account. The Vermont Agency of Transportation (VTrans) will be paying for ninety-five percent (95%) of the estimated total project costs, which recently was increased to \$6,192,000. This now sets the local share amount at \$309,060 and the additional funding in the next fiscal year, added to the current balance in this account, should cover most of the current shortfall. In the Highway CEP budget, the FY 2022/2023 addition to the account for replacing the 2012 loader in FY 2027/2028 has been increased from \$16,000 to \$19,000 using prior year surplus funds. Manager Schulz believes these are all the revisions to the initial draft of the proposed 2022/2023 Town Budget.

Chair Maxwell asked if the Select Board members had any questions or comments. Board member Miller noted his previous objection to budgeting NPD salaries so high even before negotiations on the next NPD union contract have begun. He said all else in the proposed budget looks fine. Board member Stevens said there remains in the Town Budget \$600 for Recreation Committee operations even though that group was disbanded last year. He noted that the former Recreation Committee Chair (Sally Davidson) has formed a new committee (Northfield Activities Group) and asked if this new organization have access to any of these monies. Manager Schulz did not think so since the new group has never been officially recognized by the municipality. He added that Ms. Davidson is a member of Northfield Gardeners and this organization sometimes receives municipal funds to reimburse purchases made by its members intended to help beautify the Northfield Common area, etc.

Board member Stevens believes the Municipal Pool budget line item for "Part-Time Guards" should be increased from \$30,000 to \$33,000. Board member Morse asked if the Pool Director (Shannon Palone) make this request. Board member Stevens said this was his own initiative. During the December 16, 2021 budget meeting, Ms. Palone said Randolph lifeguards make more than \$15 per hour while Northfield lifeguards are paid closer to \$12 per hour. Board member Stevens felt it was unfair to Northfield lifeguards to be paid so much less. Board member Morse is reluctant to make this change since the Pool Director did not ask for it. Chair Maxwell said Ms. Palone did say that historically Randolph does pay its lifeguards more than Northfield does. However, there was an effort a couple years ago to significantly increase the per hour compensation for Northfield lifeguards in order to match the average pay of public pool lifeguards in the Central Vermont area. He then wondered how the increase to \$33,000 would translate in regards to increased hourly wages.

Board member Goodrich has reviewed the minutes of the 12/16/21 meeting and noted Ms. Palone said her senior lifeguards usually make more than \$13 per hour. It is the younger, less experienced lifeguards who were paid at just above the state minimum wage amount, which in 2022 will increase to \$12.55 per hour. Board member Goodrich thought the minutes indicate Ms. Palone was satisfied with this situation. Board member Morse felt in the absence of an endorsement from the Pool Director, the line item should remain as is.

Chair Maxwell said he met earlier this afternoon with Manager Schulz to get his views on the long-term budgetary effects of using prior year surplus funds in this proposed FY 2022/2023 budget. Manager Schulz said the use of surplus funds was largely confined to one-time purchases so this should not have an adverse long-term effect. He did have concerns about the long-term effects of municipal employee wage increases, especially NPD officer pay increases. Manager Schulz also has real concerns about how expected significant cost increases for emergency services dispatching charges over the next couple of years will affect future Northfield Fire, Police, and Ambulance budgets. Chair Maxwell believes the FY 2022/2023 Town Budget presented is a solid budget all in all. He believes all municipalities will have problems budgeting employee compensation in the near future given the reduced pool of qualified workers, substantial COLA increases due to inflation, etc.

Motion by Board member Goodrich, seconded by Board member Morse, to approve the FY 2022/2023 Northfield Town Budget as presented by management. At Manager Schulz's request, it was clarified that the motion did not include suggested compensation increases for Northfield lifeguards and the full-time Economic Development Director. **Motion passed 4-1-0, with Board member Miller voting in the negative.** Board member Morse then thanked the municipal staff for their contributions in helping draft the proposed budget.

**V. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (UNSCHEDULED).** There was none.

**VI. ADJOURNMENT.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Goodrich, to adjourn. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

The Board adjourned at 6:24 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

*Kenneth L. McCann*

Kenneth L. McCann, Acting Clerk

An audio recording of this meeting is available in the Town Manager's Office.

These minutes were approved at the Select Board regular meeting of January 25, 2022.